

Incandescent

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Ryuko lends a hand with Satsuki's frustrations around the mansion.

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Chapter 1

“Mmm... Just move a bit will ya, Sis?”

“Like this...? Or this...?”

“That's it... Yeah, I think I can get my hand in the right place now. Just tell me if it starts to hurt, OK? I know you're not used to stuff like this.”

“It's somewhat uncomfortable, but I imagine it will get easier with practice.”

“We can swap... You can go on top next time if ya want.”

“I will give it some consideration. If we continue all afternoon, how many...?”

“All afternoon? Man, that Kiryuin stamina's somethin' else. I dunno. Until my arms get tired. And it's murder on the fingers...”

“Is there a problem?”

“It's just damn tight, Satsuki... Has this ever even been touched?”

“Excuse me for having had other things on my mind... But to answer your question: it's been some years.”

“Years? Figures. This'd be a lot easier with some oil or somethin'...”

“What are you doing with your fingers, Ryuko?”

“What!? What do you think I'm doing?”

“It's just that I was led to believe you were experienced in such matters.”

“I am experienced, dammit!”

“Nonon was so complimentary about what you did for her. And even Sanageyama said you lent him a helping hand a while back.”

“Heh. Bet you never had him pegged as the kinda guy that'd need a girl's help with stuff like this.”

“Indeed. I have made all kinds of discoveries about my erstwhile comrades recently. But if you could return your attention to the matter in hand...”

“Sure, sure... Never had this problem with Mako. Everything goes nice'n'easy when we do things like this. And she's always so enthusiastic: ‘That's it Ryuko-chan! Almost there! You can do it!’ None of this critical sniping. Really takes a girl's mind off the job in hand.”

“My apologies.”

“Y'know, the whole point of this is that it's meant to be more fun doing it together. Another smart-arse comment and next time you can sort yourself out.”

“Your forbearance is appreciated.”

“OK, OK... Yeah, that's better. Bit dusty with lack of use, that's all... you should get Rei to give it a tickle with a feather duster once in a while.”

“I will bear that in mind.”

“OK, let's just slip this thing in... Turned on?”

“No, not yet. That is... I'm not entirely sure.”

“What? How can you not...? It's your... Couldn't you have got things going before we started?”

“I didn't want to be premature.”

“Fantastic. I guess I'll just lick my fingers and stick them in.”

“I don't believe that's entirely safe, Ryuko.”

“I can wash my hands if you're worried.”

“That's not exactly what I meant. Wouldn't it be easier if I just flick the switch? Just don't be perturbed if you hear a hum - I don't think it's been used since mother was young.”

“Don't tell me she...”

“No... I don't think she ever tried this herself. It amused her more to see the exertions of the maids.”

“Look... just stay where you are... If you move now how am I going to get off on my own?”

“Ryuko...?”

“Yes, Satsuki?”

“Are you almost done...? I'm not sure I can hold on much longer...”

“What!? What happened to that stamina!?”

“It's just this position... Things are pressing in ways I had not anticipated...”

“Almost there, Sis, just hold on for a moment longer if you can... !”

“Ryuuuuuuuuuko!”

“Satsukiiiiiiii!”

Hand in hand the two of them lay on their backs on the floor of the ballroom, light from the French windows falling across their bodies in broad, golden slabs. Breath came in staccato bursts that slowed to legato as they composed themselves, and when Ryuko brushed the hair from her eyes her fingers ran tracks through the sweat on her forehead - most of the effort had been hers, after all. Well... it would have been unreasonable to expect Satsuki to take the lead in a situation like this, an entirely unfamiliar mode of exertion.

After the preceding tension, the sudden release was euphoric, and she couldn't help but laugh.

"How was it for you?"

Satsuki squeezed her hand and looked up at the pinpoint of white light far above them. To her side, the ladder she'd been holding only a minute earlier lay listlessly where it had fallen, shaken from her grasp by Ryuko's contortions at its apex. It had missed the concert grand by mere inches, which would doubtless please Nonon, but had she felt Ryuko try to steer it in that direction as she'd begun to fall? It was difficult to be certain. She looked at the open box of energy-saving bulbs that lay beside them and then back up at the faceted diameter of the crystal chandelier far above with its single bright source among the burnt-out bulbs of the ages, and smiled.

"Incandescent, Ryuko."

One down... only two hundred and thirty one bulbs remaining to drag the mansion into the twenty first century.